

Block party brings families, friends together in celebration of New Year

By Tammy Amon
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An estimated crowd of 4,000 people celebrated New Year's Eve by attending the 4th Fighter Wing's Millennium Block Party. This event was the first of its kind to be held at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.

The outdoor festivities took place in front of the enlisted club and bowling center adjacent to the community center. Area streets were closed to traffic and were transformed into a carnival-like atmosphere through the efforts of the civil engineer and services squadrons, as well as Honor Guard members and other volunteers. Rows of light-cicles twinkled above the striped tents that lined the "midway."

Early evening activities were planned for children, while the schedule for teenagers and adults would last throughout the evening. Ken Tyler, community support flight chief, proclaimed this to be the best family event he had participated in during his career with services squadrons.

Open to the base populace, the evening's events kicked off at 6 p.m. with free food, party favors, and trike races for children. A local disc jockey, sponsored by USPA&IRA, entertained the masses with music and karaoke while costumed characters interacted with the youths.

Diana Pelletier, youth center director, called this a "family-type celebration" and commented on the surprising, yet pleasing, response to the event. She said participation exceeded the planning committee's expectations by far. "Fifty pounds of popcorn was not nearly enough," according to Pelletier. "We planned for 500 children when we should have counted on 1500." Other free food items included cotton candy, corn dogs and soft drinks.

Beth Hodge, family member support flight chief, oversaw the distribution of party hats and glow-in-the-dark necklaces, which she said were very popular with the youth. Volunteers at the booth offered face painting. Hodge added that the air bouncer was also a favorite; over 700 children enjoyed this activity.

The community center's teen lounge provided older youths with a place to socialize, play video games and shoot pool from 6 to 9 p.m. said Brenda Dearing, social program coordinator. The lounge was open to all teens. Dearing said the youths had a good time and enjoyed the free refreshments before moving outside for the pre-millennium countdown.

DJ Wild Heart led the children in a special millennium countdown at 9 p.m., as Warren Caruso, outdoor recreation manager, hoisted a pipe-like cannon into the air and launched "flutter fetti" 60-feet into the night sky. The crowd cheered as the streamers and confetti wafted down to the Earth.

Free cosmic bowling for children and adults was a definite draw according to Lynda Cipollone, bowling center manager. Although the committee had planned for children to bowl from 6 to 9 p.m. and teenagers to adults from 9:30 p.m. until closing, Cipollone said families wanted to bowl together. She added that more people had bowled in one evening than she sees in three average days. The generosity of such commercial sponsors as USPA&IRA and Bank of America helped to offset the \$1,866 expense of free bowling.

As the children's activities were winding down, the adult entertainment was gearing up. The Treehuggers Band, sponsored in part by the officers' club and a local car dealership, performed live on the center stage located at the end of the pavilion. 1st Lt. Joseph Thomas of combat and readiness and 4 SVS Marketing Director Robin DeMark entertained the crowd with trivia and frozen T-shirt contests during intermissions. Prizes were provided by local sponsors and 4 SVS.

Vendors in nearby tents peddled food, beverages and millennium souvenirs. Several squadron booster clubs manned booths that offered a variety of fast food items. Alcoholic beverages were available for purchase to customers wearing wristbands acquired at the ID booth. The First Sergeants' Association sold beverages and commemorative glasses, which were big-sellers. Further down the strip, the skills development center offered millennium T-shirts, ball caps and coffee mugs designed by 4 SVS marketing department's graphic designers Cynthia Aldridge and Tammy Amon.

According to Cipollone, the bowling center alone grossed almost \$3,000 in food sales. They served more than 600 slices of pizza over the course of the evening.

Bo Hughes, resource management flight chief, said customers flocked to "The Fun Money Machine." He called it a "raging success" and said over \$1,900 in cash was given to those who were fortunate enough to step into the booth. No one left empty-handed, and some people grabbed \$100 or more at a time. Assisted by Carrie Sanders, Hughes kept a close watch on the cash flow each time a customer exited the machine. Their objective was to keep at least two \$100 bills plus \$100 in smaller denominations circulating for each customer. The money in the booth was replenished several times before midnight.

Inside the enlisted club, each of the four lounges were filled to capacity said Ian Williams, club manager. Deejays in each lounge catered to the musical tastes of most everyone. "Disco & Dance" was played in the Club Lounge, "R&B" played in the Top Three Lounge, "Kickin' Country" played in the ballroom, and "Top 40 Hits" played in the Kitty Hawk Lounge.

Many watchers endured the chilly temperature at the midnight hour to view the fireworks, which marked the beginning of the New Year. Even members and guests of the enlisted club stepped outside to take part in the momentous occasion. Following the fireworks display, many celebrants filed into the bowling center for a millennium breakfast buffet.

Jim Ward, 4 SVS deputy remarked on the positive feedback he heard from participants at the event and days that followed. Comments ranged from “outstanding” to “the best thing that ever happened to Seymour Johnson.”

Brig. Gen. Norman Seip said, “Let’s do it again next year!”

According to 4 SVS sources, the block party’s success was the culmination of four months of planning and two months of publicity. Many people and numerous hours were involved in organizing an event of this magnitude.

The block party was publicized in the base paper and issues of the Services magazine during the weeks leading up to the main event. Through the innovation of the marketing department’s director, a slide show was compiled and used as a promotional tool at various squadron briefings , as well as Officers’ and Enlisted Wives’ Club meetings. DeMark introduced “web-based marketing” by collaborating with 4 SVS data automation systems administrator SrA Reggie Blaisdell and the communications squadron to place the slide show on the base intranet, Seymour Johnson’s public access page and marketing’s home page. The event was advertised on the local cable network channel and an interview with Aldridge, 4 SVS Commercial Sponsorship Coordinator, aired on a local radio station.

DeMark commented on the excellent support received from the 4th FW command, public affairs, the communications and civil engineer squadrons, as well as area businesses. 4 SVS people, the honor guard and security forces also contributed immensely.

Ward said financial support for the event was pooled from the command level, 4 SVS and local sponsors. According to him, Seymour Johnson received \$10K in seed money from the Air Combat Command/Services Community Care 99 Program. Another \$12K was raised at the base level from sponsorship and local funds.

Aldridge said feedback from participating sponsors was positive and they were overwhelmed by the success of the event. “Sponsorship interest is definitely out there,” she said.

John Stiles, representing USPA&IRA, a corporate sponsor, said he was extremely pleased with the organization of the event and the exposure his company received.

Other sponsors were Scott Motor Company, Bank of America and Seymour Johnson Federal Credit Union. Jeffreys Beer & Wine Company, Texas Steakhouse & Saloon, The Tire & Muffler Center, Adam’s Auto Wash, Schlotsky’s Deli, The Honey Baked Ham Company, Andy’s Cheesesteaks & Cheeseburgers, Chick-Fil-A, Burger King and Coastal Beverage provided additional support through gifts and donations. (No federal endorsement of sponsors intended.)

To receive an electronic copy of the Millennium Block Party slide show, contact Robin DeMark, 4 SVS marketing director, at DSN 722-5318 or e-mail robin.demark@seymourjohnson.af.mil.



Families cheered as “flutter fetti” was shot 60-feet into the sky and wafted down onto the earth during the Seymour Johnson AFB New Year’s Eve block party.